FOREIGN SERVICE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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SECURITY : UNCLASSIFIED PRIORITY: AIR POUCH

TO : Department of State 755.11/8-250

FROM : The Hague No. 240 August 2, 1950

REF :

SUBJECT : INITIAL DUTCH PRESS REACTION TO ANNOUNCEMENT OF LEOPOLD'S ABDICATION

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EUR INDEX

ACTION INFO: EUR DCR UNA OLI IE C

Dutch newspapers still hold fast to their respective party lines in commenting on King Leopold's decision to turn the throne temporarily over to his son, Prince Baudouin, and to abdicate when the Prince reaches the age of 21.

The Catholic and right-wing newspaper tend to be horrified and alarmed at this development, while the Socialist press, according to form, are rather pleased by it.

Most vehement, perhaps, is right-wing DE TELEGRAAF. It admits that a King opposed by 42% of his people is not "the right man in the right place", but declares that this argument is now beside the point. The Socialists agreed to a plebiscite, it points out, and since then have shown themselves to be very poor democrats. The paper goes on to say that Spaak, "a wealthy man with broad views and one of the people regarded as a sound investment by Wall Street", has called a revolution, and American public opinion can now place Mr. Spaak next to Mr. Chiang-Kai-shek, another bad investment.

Right-wing liberal NIEUWE COURANT is no less critical. Many who at first sympathized with the Belgian Socialists, writes this paper, have become revolted by their subsequent activities. Like full-fledged Communists they have used political strikes and threatened a revolution. Such action is incompatible with a democratic state. The Socialists have tried to shame the King, the paper concludes, and have succeeded only in shaming their country and themselves.

Catholic DE MAASBODE declares that the King's advisors should have foreseen the consequences of his return to Belgium, but goes on to assert that "terrorism has won, and may be used again to sabotage decisions taken in a democratic manner".

Catholic DE TIJD also declares that "democracy has received a heavy blow". It blisters the Socialists for their action, but

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action, but also criticises the Catholics for having failed to anticipate the consequences of their decision. It would have been better, the paper observes, for the Catholics to have retreated earlier when it was still possible to avoid such a terrible defeat for democracy.

Independent conservative HAAGSCHE COURANT attacks the Socialists for "improvised revolutions", declaring that "one cannot use tar without becoming dirty", and adds that it is questionable whether Belgium is still a democracy or whether the Socialists can still be called democrats.

The NIEUWE ROTTERDAMSE COURANT (Freedom and Democracy) ignores the Belgian Socialists and directs its attack against the King's advisers. "They appear to have expected", the paper writes, "that feelings would eventually subside, but the King's position was clearly much weaker than they anticipated." The paper adds that King Leopold demonstrated a remarkable lack of political insight, since he should have drawn the logical conclusions from the fact that the majority supporting him was so small.

Socialist HET VRIJE VOLK continues its support of the Belgian Socialist position. It compliments the Socialist and Liberals on their "self-discipline and common sense in not maintaining their demand for immediate abdication", observing that such a demand might have caused "the stubborn King to refuse foolishly at the last moment". The paper concludes by predicting that the present disorder in Belgium will cease only when the Catholic Party has the courage to purge "its blinded hotheads".

Independent Socialist HAAGSCH DAGBLAD takes a less pro-Socialist position, beginning with the observation that a sound democrat should accept decisions taken by the majority. However, the paper believes that the King and his advisers erred greatly in assuming that the pre-war popularity of Leopold was so great that the Belgians would now accept him in spite of all subsequent criticisms and rumors. The result, according to the paper, is a "tragedy of a repeated mistake at the highest level". Emotion and aggression, the paper concludes, now dominate the whole situation, and the future of Belgium and the Belgian monarchy do not look very bright.

For the Ambassador:
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